Rodney Horace Yale (1864–1937)

Origin and Family

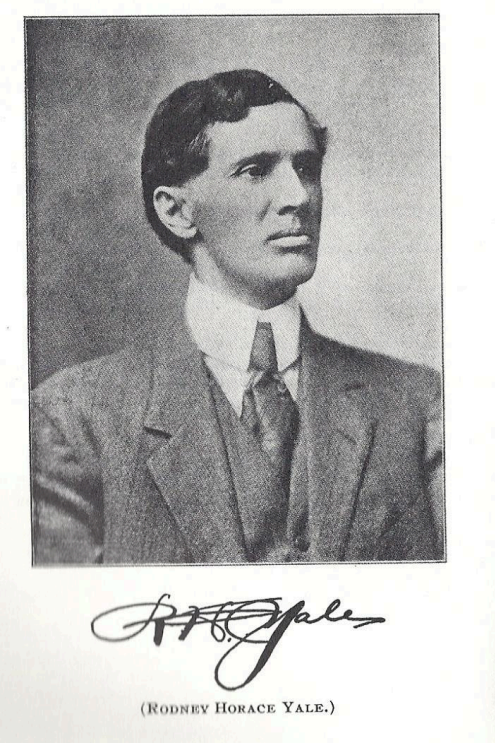
Born Sept 26, 1864. Died Nov 4, 1937, Age 73.

Father: Gad Lowrey Yale (1810–1882)
Mother: Mary M. W. Wilsey (1821–1894)
Spouse: Minnie Elizabeth Dennis (1866–1932)

Children:[1]

- Darrell Rodney Yale (1887–1889)
- Rexford Warner Yale (1890–)
- Dean Everitt Yale (1892–1945)
- Donald Lewis Yale (1896–)

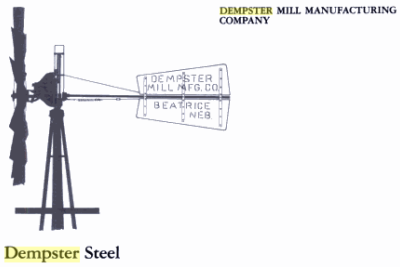
Rodney Horace Yale wrote the highly regarded “The Yale Genealogy and History of Wales” in 1908.[1]



From his book:[1] “Rodney Horace Yale, of 722 North 7th St., Beatrice, Neb., married June 29, 1886, at Beatrice, Minnie Elizabeth Dennis, of Crab Orchard, Neb., who was born May 17, 1866, in Adams County, Ill. She is the daughter of Hon. Sylvester S. Dennis and Elizabeth Short-Dennis. Mrs. Yale learned the printer’s art and was, when married, editor and publisher of the “News” at Crab Orchard, Neb.”

Rodney describes his wife’s family as follows: Minnie Elizabeth Dennis’ father, Sylvester Dennis, “was one of the pioneers of Kansas, and a veteran of the Mexican War. He hunted buffalo for the pelts and meat while your mother was a young girl, and she remembers seeing vast herds of buffalo on the central Kansas plains, when they lived in Great Bend, Kansas. Minnie’s mother was Elizabeth Short, who was from a prominent Georgia family.[3] Minnie came from a wealthy family and was a financial supporter of his manufacturing and other business enterprises. She was an accomplished violinist and pianist in her early life.[2]

“Mr. Yale was born on his father’s farm in Lynn Township, Knox County, Ill., and received his education at the Yale District School, taking up several advanced and special studies, by private arrangement with his instructors. His father dying in 1882, he moved, with his mother, sisters, and brothers, to Beatrice Neb., where he met and married his wife.”[1]



© M. Brian Yale, 2025

Occupation and Property

Rodney first engaged in the mercantile business with his brothers in Crab Orchard. In the fall of 1885, he joined the Gale Sulky Harrow Co of Detroit, Mich., as salesman, remaining with them for about two seasons, when he engaged in the fire insurance business. In October, 1886, he removed to Holdrege, Neb., where he was engaged in the water supply business for some years, with his brothers M.L. and E.F., and in the fall of 1890, he joined the Dempster Mill Mfg. Co., of Beatrice, Neb., as traveling collector. In 1891 he was engaged as traveling salesman for the same company and in March 1895, was promoted to manager of sales for this company and removed to their headquarters in Beatrice Neb. In 1896, he also assumed the management of credits and accounts collections, in connection with the sales management and January 15, 1898, was elected director and secretary of the company, which has grown and prospered, until it became one of the nation's largest manufacturers in its field, employing about seven hundred people with branch houses at Kansas City, Mo., Omaha Neb., and Sioux Falls, S.D.. There were also branch factories and mills at Memphis, Tenn., and Mobile, Ala.[1]

Rodney was also interested in farming, having a large farm in the irrigated section of the Platte Valley, about one mile south of Brule, Neb. He was an occasional writer of special articles for some of the leading periodicals.[1]

Rodney explained, “My wife and I moved to Beatrice, Neb., in March 1895, to take on [the manager of sales] position in the office of the Dempster Mill Mfg. Co. I traded our home in Holdrege for land (640 acres) one mile south of Brule, Neb. The land cost us about $6.50 per acre. I later bought 82 acres cornering the 640 acre section on the Northeast for $1.25 per acre.” While at Dempster, “for many years the salaries of the President and myself were the same. No other person received as high salaries while I was there, which was $200/mo, $2,400.00 per year. This was a good salary in those times. The president often said he would never accept a higher salary than I should receive.”[2]

In the 1890s, Rodney had a brief, unsuccessful interest in an oil drilling venture. He was made President of Globe Oil, a company that was capitalized with about $10,000 primarily from co-workers in the Dempster Co. With mineral rights in the town of Fossil, Montana, they drilled a single well and found oil but it was diluted with water to the extent that it was impractical to continue the operation.[2]

Also in the 1890s, Rodney became a public speaker and college guest speaker on pump irrigation – a keenly interesting topic due to a protracted drought in Nebraska in those times.

Rodney belonged to the Beatrice Club, a businessmen’s service club and eventually became its president.[2]

Rodney was a prolific inventor and entrepreneur:

> “I took out a number of U.S. Patents at sundry times following 1900. The first were five patents relating to a stroke regulator for windmills; the idea being to increase the stroke of the windmill in accordance with the wind velocity and thereby increase the work performed accordingly, in amount, automatically. I built a number of regulators while with the Dempster Co., which produced the desired results; but before I had the machine commercially developed a man came along, John A. Snee, of Pittsburgh, Penn., who came from Pittsburgh to buy the patents. He offered me $2,000.00 for the five patents and I sold them to him, as I needed the money at the time. I never learned what use he made of the patents, but I heard they were used in connection with the pumping of oil wells.”[2]

© M. Brian Yale, 2025

> Rodney also took five patents on seat backs for farm equipment, and sold a quantity of the seats to the Montgomery Ward Company. Rodney had many other patents and ideas for patents, including improvements for railroads, autos, submarines, and dams. He was not able to garner interest or support for these ideas, lamenting *"Oftentimes patents are in advance of the times and are not accepted by those in command of the present"* [2]

Rodney spent a lot of time on the road, visiting small towns to sell or collect payment from customers. In 1890, while in St. Francis, Kansas, he tells this incredible story:

> "…while playing cards in the hotel we heard shots across the street, which we paid no attention to as it was usual to hear shots around town at that time in those small western towns. A railroad brakeman ran to the door and said there was a man shot across the street. We went out to where the crowd had gathered and I recognized the man as Mr. Brown, who I had a deal with during that day. I asked him who shot him and he named the man. The landlord and I went back to the hotel office and he got his .45 revolver and I got a .36 revolver from my satchel and we left instructions to get Mr. Brown into the hotel. We started up the street where the man had run. While we were standing in the light in front of a drug store, the man came out from between the drug store and the next building. He was in a stooping position and had his hand in his side pocket. We ordered him to put up his hands, but he failed to do it – the Landlord told him he had better do it or we would "drill" him. Another man showed up and said he was his friend and that he would surrender. I told him to go to his friend and get his gun, or it might go hard with him. His friend took hold of his hand that was partly in his pocket and we then found that he had a gun in his hand, which we suspected. We started back to the hotel with the prisoner and met the deputy Sheriff and turned him in to the deputy."
>
> "Mr. Brown asked me to take his ante-mortem statement, which I did while he coughed blood at almost every word. He died before morning. The man got 20 years for the shooting. There were several of his friends present and I presume they swore it was self-defense and that Brown had a knife; but Brown stated to me that he had no knife, as had been claimed by the shooter."[2]

From these accounts, we gain insight into the strong sense of responsibility shown by Rodney. His grandson William A. Yale noted that he was not a religious man, suggesting that his resolve may have been shaped by his pioneer upbringing and the civic ideals of his time.

In another harrowing 1893 incident in Holdrege, Rodney reluctantly agreed to accompany a Marshal (Jack McColl) to arrest a Dr. Clemmons, who had shot a man in an argument over a woman, after the man had "broken a hardwood chair over his head and had cut many holes in his head and face." Dr. Clemmons incorrectly believed he had killed the man, and holed up in his house, swearing never to be taken alive. He had already fired five shots at another Marshal who had come to arrest him.

> "When I came in sight of him first I was about 150 feet from the house, and he was at the screen door pushing cartridges in a double barreled shotgun. When he saw me he yelled for me to stop or he would shoot. I realized I could not turn back – in his excited, drunken condition he would probably shoot me anyway. I began to talk to him and move slowly towards him, telling him that he had not killed the other man, and that he would be alright if he surrendered. I yelled to Jack to stop where he was, about 50 feet from the house behind a buggy, and I kept talking to Dr Clemmons while I continued to advance until I finally reached the screen door. When he turned to tell his wife to lock the back door, I reached inside the door and grasped the gun barrel, and told him sharply to let go of the gun. He did, and I at once removed the cartridges and set the gun down.
>
> I then took him to the Surgeon's office and had his wounds dressed. Afterwards, he agreed to go with the Marshal, but he was only charged with "fighting".[3]

© M. Brian Yale, 2025

Rodney's lesson from this experience, expressed as advice to his sons was "always avoid taking up the duties of peace officers except when absolutely necessary, as serious risks are often incurred in doing so."[3] Rodney was 29 years old at the time.

"Rodney Horace Yale terminated his successful employment with Dempster's Manufacturing Company, Beatrice, Neb., in 1912, after 22 years of service ranging from accounts collector to director of the firm. In the same year, he organized a family manufacturing firm known, initially, as Plattner and Yale" and later as Yale and Hopewell on Y Street in Lincoln, Neb. Mr. Yale invented some improvements for water pumps and windmills, which were the major products of the company, and were sold worldwide." [2]

Rodney successfully negotiated a deal with the Lincoln, Neb. Chamber of Commerce and a local bank to bring the Plattner Manufacturing Company of Denver to Lincoln. The deal involved $40,000 up front and a $35,000 line of credit from the bank. It took 40 rail cars to move the factory, but once in production it employed 125 people."[2]

Rodney's large Platte River Valley farm became an important early demonstration project for proving the value of irrigating farmland with relatively low cost water, which could be pumped to the surface in large volume from relatively shallow wells. Feed grains and alfalfa for hogs, dairy, and beef cattle all grew in abundance, and set the stage for the expansion in production of meat and grain in Midwestern states.

Rodney was president and general manager of the Plattner Manufacturing Company. His sons, Rexford W. and Donald L. were in charge of sales and accounting while his son Dean E. was foundry superintendent. World War I caused a sharp decline in production. A serious shortage of labor and raw materials merged into the "bank panic" of 1922, all of which, finally, caused closure of the plant and sale of the Western Nebraska farm land in 1923. The Ammon family purchased the Yale and Hopewell Manufacturing business in 1923.

Rodney soon followed his son Dean E. Yale and his family when they moved to the west coast late in 1923. Once in San Diego, Rodney and son Dean opened the "Yale Realty Company" (still in operation in 1980). It was a family business, concerning land and community development and sales.[2]

R.H. Yale was also a consultant to the San Diego County Water Resources Development Board concerning the impounding of water behind dams throughout the county. He was considered an authority on dam structures and equipment. [2]

© M. Brian Yale, 2025

End of Life

Rodney died in San Diego on November 4, 1937, at age 73, some five years after the death of his wife, Minnie Elizabeth Yale, at age 65, on April 21, 1932. Both are buried in the Greenwood Mausoleum in San Diego."[2]

William A. Yale, grandson to Rodney Horace, remembered him fondly as a very formal man who was always well dressed and took his duties as a Notary Public quite seriously. But, he recalled that his grandfather always had a nickel for him when he would visit.[3]

Research Notes

Online Genealogy References:
WikiTree ID: Yale-808
FamilySearch ID: KCBV-7GG
Find a Grave Memorial ID: 292892641

Further Reading:

- Yale, Max Brian. *Guide to the Max Brian Yale Genealogical Collection*. *Max Brian Yale Genealogical Collection.* 2025
- Yale, Max Brian. *Yale Family Coat of Arms* - Origin and History. *Max Brian Yale Genealogical Collection*, 2025

References

1. Yale, Rodney Horace. *Yale Genealogy and History of Wales*. Beatrice, NE: Milburn & Scott, 1908. Ref no. 2143 page 488

2. Yale, Donald Rodney, et al. The Yales and Wales. 2nd ed. San Diego, CA: Privately printed, 1980. Revised from the 1908 work by Rodney Horace Yale. Ref. no. 2143, p. 488.

3. Yale, Max Brian. *Private Collection of historical papers and manuscripts.*

© M. Brian Yale, 2025